

Eco, Latin America, and the West

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THE JOURNAL *ECO: REVISTA DE LA CULTURA DE OCCIDENTE* PUBLISHED ITS first volume in May 1960, with the financial support of the Instituto Cultural Colombo-Alemán in Bogotá, Colombia. The journal continued to publish its volumes on a monthly basis until 1984, weathering five changes in editorial leadership and periodic financial difficulties. In the early years, its editorial staff and contributors were drawn primarily from a small local group of European expatriate intellectuals. Its editors, in announcing their intention to provide a voice of and for *la cultura de occidente*, advocated a fundamental connection between Latin America and the Western tradition. At the same time, the journal proposed what at first glance must have struck many Latin American readers as little more than a curiosity: it promised to introduce its Latin American audience to a Germanic face that had historically been overshadowed in these latitudes by its French, English, and Spanish brethren.

A survey of the volumes published in the first years of the journal's existence underscores several important differences that distinguish *Eco* from other cultural reviews published in Latin America during the Cold War

years. For one thing, the near absence of Latin American authors in the initial years of the journal's publication is striking.¹ The early volumes comprise a diverse collection of Spanish-language translations, primarily of texts originally written in German. The works chosen for translation cover a broad range of fields, including modern poetry, short stories, and literary criticism, as well as myriad essays on philosophy, physics, economics, sociology, education, and political theory. The diversity of materials is in fact so pronounced that it leaves one with the sense of dealing with an arbitrary selection. While there are very few published accounts of the journal's history to be found, it is not difficult to surmise that the unusual orientation of the journal is due in part to the nostalgia of a particular expatriate community.² What cannot be easily explained by recourse to psychological notions, however, is the prevailing tone in which this dissemination takes place, a tone of crisis and decline. This crisis, which Eduardo Jaramillo aptly terms a "humanism in exile," concerns a certain concept of "culture" whose continued viability as a historical or ideological project has been called into question midway through the twentieth century. Faced with the emergence of new technological and economic forces, as well as a radical redrawing of geopolitical boundaries following the end of World War II, the journal reflects the uneasy sense that the notion of "culture" that prevailed in what we call "the West" for much of the previous two centuries is today decisively losing ground to the nihilistic drive of individualism and technicity. It is the interrelation between the cultural, the geopolitical, and nihilism that I propose to explore here, and which may in turn shed some light on the uncertain status of *Eco* as a Latin American cultural journal.

The essence of nihilism is to bring about what Nietzsche termed the devaluation of the highest values—highest either in the sense of a "true" world believed to lie beyond ours, or in the sense of a transcendent meaning assigned to existence in this world (such as an ultimate meaning, destiny, or unity). In contrast to both religion and secular humanism, nihilism prompts the complacent attitude that life leads to nothing, and that all "truth" is merely an "appearance" projected by the will itself. The two-page editorial statement which inaugurates the first published volume of *Eco* in 1960 (hereafter referred to as "Propósito") concludes with

an allusion to the journal's title, a figure which can be heard as constituting a kind of bridge between the Germanic and Hispano-American worlds. At the same time, it announces the journal's intentions to combat the spread of nihilism through the revitalization of the "spirit" of the Western cultural tradition.

Esta revista aspira a constituir un eco de las más notables y verdaderas voces de Occidente, en particular del ámbito alemán. Mas su propósito no es la producción de un mero reflejo intelectual, sino estimular, en la medida de sus fuerzas, la aventura espiritual del hombre de Occidente y, de modo más concreto, del hombre hispano-americano. Esas voces y ese *eco* son nuestro programa de acción. Sólo el espíritu defiende al espíritu.

[This journal aspires to echo the most notable and truthful voices of the West, and in particular within the German sphere. Its purpose is not to produce a mere intellectual reflection, but rather to stimulate, to the greatest extent of its power, the spiritual adventure of Western man, and, more concretely, of Hispano-American man. Those voices and this *echo* give shape to our plan of action. Spirit alone comes to the defense of spirit.]

The disclaimer found in the second sentence aims to defuse two potentially fatal charges in the same breath. In Spanish as in English, *reflejo* can mean either the sensible reflection produced by a mirror or some other surface as it throws back light or heat toward its original source, or it can mean the intellectual activity involved in consideration, recollection, and the mind's knowledge of itself. Both of these senses are employed in this phrase, which plays with and seeks to justify the journal's somewhat surprising title.

Let us focus for a moment on each of these senses in turn. In the first sense, the noun *reflejo* refers metonymically to the act of imitation, albeit in order to assert what the journal will not be. The caveat seeks to defuse the charges of Eurocentrism that will inevitably follow a Latin American journal whose goal is, according to a March-April 1971 editorial (hereafter referred to as "Adónde vamos"), "the transmission of the cultural treasures of European origin" (465). The European and Germanic origin of this

translation project, the editorial insists, does not represent an *eidos* which Hispano-American cultural production would be expected to emulate. The results of this project of translation and dissemination will not be reiterations of the same. But what, then, are these “echoes” if they are not identical to what they repeat? I will return to this question below.

The second sense of reflection, as intellectual activity, similarly seeks to distance itself from suspicions that the journal engages in nothing more than abstract speculation and elitism (a different form of nihilism, perhaps). What, then, is the link that would justify the journal’s attempt to situate itself on the side of praxis rather than mere theory? A response is immediately offered in the preceding clause: “sino estimular, en la medida de sus fuerzas, la aventura espiritual . . .” A similar sentiment can be found in the second editorial statement just mentioned (“Adónde vamos”). It is worth citing as well, in that it helps to shed more light on the complexity that accompanies the references to “culture” in *Eco*:

Cuando buscamos lo bueno dondequiera que se esconde, así fuese en los más apartados rincones del pensamiento o de la inventiva poética, lo hacemos sin parar mientes en la opinión de quienes nos tildan de “escapistas,” pero convencidos, eso sí, de que un solo apunte del viejo Lichtenberg, una sagaz observación de Jacobo Burkhardt, una página de Kafka bien leída, vigorosamente estimulan el descontento frente al estado de la cultura contemporánea y más eficazmente contribuyen a nuestras inquietudes que cien manifestaciones mal concebidos y peor escritos.

[When we seek the good wherever it may hide, be it even in the most obscure regions of thought or of poetry, we do so without stopping to consider the opinion of those who fault us for being “escapists.” We are convinced, indeed, that a single note from old Lichtenberg, a wise observation of Jakob Burkhardt, or a single page of Kafka read well, vigorously stimulate our dissatisfaction with the contemporary state of culture, and more effectively prompt our uneasiness than do a hundred manifestoes that are poorly conceived and even more poorly written.]

This second passage underscores the distance from nihilism that *Eco* would like to claim for itself: its material, far removed from escapist fantasy, harbors a radical potentiality that promises an antidote against the reduction of all being to the terms of technicity. It is capable of provoking in the reader a sense of *descontento*, of *unpleasure* or *discontent* with the world as it appears today, prompting him or her to awaken, take a step back, and call into question truths that had heretofore seemed self-evident. The rhetorical manipulation of the notion of aesthetic pleasure, a figure first evoked in the paraphrased allegation of *escapismo* and appearing again in the reference to *descontento*, gives notice that the role which the journal envisions for its material does not necessarily coincide with traditional aesthetic ideologies, according to which literature and the arts are either seen as a merely pleasurable—and hence essentially unproductive—activity, or are assigned a restorative role of preserving or recuperating truth in the form of values and identities. Indeed, the most interesting implication of this account lies in what it refuses: in appealing to literature (as well as other forms of writing), this discourse resists situating its object on either side of the metaphysical distinction between being and nonbeing, truth and falsity, or productivity and nonproductivity. It refuses to accept the political condemnation of literature as escapism, but it does not fully accede to the customary argument that literature is in fact on the side of production, truth, and being. What is more, this passage does not offer a theory of “literature”—understood as an art object or work of genius—at all. Instead, it describes an experience of the literary. Whatever it is that calls out and shakes us in “Kafka” is not reducible to any innate quality belonging to the writer or the work (genius, etc.), but is rather a matter of reading well (“una página de Kafka bien leída”). In this light, the difference which literature could be said to make is necessarily beyond calculation.

HUMANISM IN EXILE: *ECO* AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE COLD WAR

In view of the increasing demand for specialized knowledge in modern society, the disregard shown by *Eco* for both disciplinary boundaries and the

distinction between general and specialist knowledge should be understood as an attempt to reaffirm the status enjoyed by the arts and letters within the humanistic tradition: that is, a totality and unity that is in principle available to all, and which is seen as instrumental for the development of human virtue. Similarly, the full title of the journal signals its intent to recover a certain understanding of “culture” whose emergence coincided precisely with the formation of modern nation-states in Europe and the Americas beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and which was regarded by many intellectuals as an ideal instrument for shaping good citizens for the state. This concept of culture, understood pedagogically as the training of the mind, judgment, and taste for the development of the “whole” person, called for a fusing of the particular and the universal, or a crossing of national character with a tradition of art, language, and thought regarded as the common heritage of the West. By the mid-twentieth century, however, the necessity of culture had been called into question by the emergence of new competition from the economic and technological spheres. The logic of the market was felt to play an increasing role in shaping subjectivity on the one hand, and the incursion of transnational forces in Latin America—such as new forms of telecommunication and transportation—could likewise be said to cast their shadows over the edifice of the nation-state and national culture. Responding to the increasing dominance of technology in the postwar years, the nascent journal envisioned itself as a kind of stabilizing jetty against the rationale of technicity, which nihilistically asserts itself as the sole legitimate measure of the good.³

The historical moment of *Eco*’s emergence is characterized by a general feeling of pessimism among intellectuals in Europe and the Americas regarding the viability of the Western tradition as a guiding historical force. A good number of the texts chosen for translation attest to the fact that it is increasingly difficult for critical intellectuals to sustain their belief that the resources of the Enlightenment will be sufficient to ensure the survival of Western civilization. In the wake of two world wars and Auschwitz, followed by the onset of the Cold War and the partitioning of Europe into two armed camps—each of which is calculating the technological annihilation of the other—the West is confronted by the impossibility of sustaining its

old belief in the ideals of progress, rationality, equality, and justice. The emergence of *Eco* both testifies to this impossibility and avoids it.

One of the most poignant indicators of this can be found in the myriad articles reflecting on the dissolution and scattering of a broad intellectual community that formerly resided in Central Europe. Exile names the fate of all those who, for one reason or another, by virtue of wartime devastation or postwar political divisions, find themselves permanently displaced, unable to return home and resurrect their prewar lives. Noteworthy in this respect is the translation of an essay by George Steiner (1964), which recounts the plight of the German Marxist literary critic Hans Meyer. Unlike many Central European intellectuals who opted not to return home—or who were simply unable to return—following World War II, Meyer was determined to resume work at his university position in Leipzig, a city long known as the capital of the German printing industry, but which now belonged to a new sphere known as Eastern Europe or the Soviet bloc. Meyer returned to his position in Leipzig, where he withstood years of political pressure and isolation before finally resigning his post and leaving his home altogether. For Steiner, Meyers's saga is indicative of the fate not only of a generation but of an entire way of life. His ultimate abandonment of Leipzig signals that the world formerly known as Central Europe has now become unlivable, and that future generations there will—to Steiner's eternal lament—more likely feel at home in Peking or Albania than in Cologne.

One suspects that the anti-communist tenor of Steiner's essay hides an even more profound uneasiness concerning the new trajectory that the West seemed likely to take following the war. Through his personalization of the plight of the Central European intellectual, Steiner also calls attention to the radical dismantling and reorganization of a specific, concrete spatial order that had defined the West—with Europe of course at its center—for much of modernity. Not only have national boundaries in Europe been redrawn and sovereign states fragmented according to new friend/enemy distinctions, but the very calculus of the political would appear to have shifted—and with it, no doubt, the status of culture itself. The old, culturally-inscribed criteria on which friend/enemy distinctions were based in the West (civilized/barbaric) are rapidly being displaced by

a new set of economic criteria (debtor/creditor) coinciding with the hegemonic role assumed by the United States and the concurrent spread of the “American way of life.” These reservations concerning the planetary spread of the “American way of life” were shared by many in Latin America in the decades following World War II who did not need Europeans to warn them of the violence inherent in the Western Hemisphere policies of the United States. The prevailing discourse of *Eco*, while by no means anti-American in tenor, seeks to align itself with this general sense of apprehension and resistance, presenting “Western culture” as an antidote to an individualist consumer mentality that could—at least in the early 1960s—only be associated with the United States.

Were one to change the dates of publication by 50 or more years back in time, it would be easy to position *Eco* alongside Domingo Sarmiento, José Enrique Rodó, and other Latin American intellectuals who turned to European high culture for solutions to Latin America’s social, political, and economic problems. Sarmiento’s project, however, belongs to an entirely different time. The emergence of *Eco* coincides, whether one cares to acknowledge it or not, with the awareness that the nineteenth-century concept of culture, and the project it entailed, is now on its deathbed. The many appeals to “the Western tradition” should not be taken at face value as referring to a stable point of reference—or at least not exclusively so. In addition, these calls should be heard as the uncanny echoes of an emerging attunement, and as attempting to name something new. One could characterize the gap between Sarmiento and *Eco* as a reversal of terms: whereas Sarmiento imagined that Latin America needed European culture to overcome its congenital “lack,” *Eco* espouses the conviction that the Western tradition needs Latin America if it is to take on a new life.

ECO AND THE LATIN AMERICAN LITERARY BOOM

The journal gives evidence of several significant transformations during the early to mid 1960s, in particular concerning the geographical and linguistic origin of the texts selected for publication. As a result, the journal assumes

two new focal points: Hispanism and Latin America. In 1964, the Spanish press Seix Barral—which, in the same year, would for the first time award its prestigious Biblioteca Breve prize to a Latin American novel, Mario Vargas Llosa's *La ciudad y los perros*—signed on as a financial backer of the journal. As part of the agreement, beginning in November 1964 the editorial duties were to be shared between Hernando Valencia Goelkel (previously editor of the journal *Mito*) in Bogotá, and José María Castellet (a Spanish poet) in Barcelona. The editorial statement written by Castellet for the December 1964 edition announced a new regional emphasis: its new orientation would allow the journal to combat the prevailing “cosmopolitanism” of the times—which term, for Castellet, was synonymous with rootlessness and the homogenization of differences—by turning to a Hispanist identity politics. In the short term, this proclamation did not do much to lessen the journal's heavy emphasis on translated Germanic texts. And in fact, the financial and editorial relationship between *Eco* and Seix Barral proved to be short-lived and was terminated six months later (the last coproduced volume was published in May 1965). However, this brief marriage with a major Spanish printing house did leave at least one notable mark on the face of *Eco*: the following years were accompanied by a steady increase in the publication of literary texts by Latin American authors, as well as literary analysis of the works of Gabriel García Márquez and others. If it is true, as the Chilean novelist José Donoso suggests, that the Latin American Boom novel had to travel to Spain in order to establish its place among the “great works” of the Western tradition, then the transformation of *Eco* between 1960 and 1964 gives evidence of the speed with which this signal traveled between Latin America and Spain and back again.

The new attention to Latin American writers in *Eco* underscores the two-fold significance often attributed to the Boom novel. On one hand, the critical renown and economic success of writers like Cortázar, Fuentes, García Márquez, and Vargas Llosa abroad translates into the perception that Latin America has finally attained autonomy in terms of symbolic production. Latin America is no longer consigned to the peripheral status of consuming—and reproducing bad copies of—European models, and likewise its literary production ceases to be captive to the provincial constraints of local

taste. In other words, Latin America can no more be regarded as a site of mere particularity: the Boom marks its entrance onto the universal stage of Western civilization. But the celebration of the Boom is not based exclusively on the presumed leveling-out of the dissymmetry that has always marked Latin America in relation to the West. The association of the Boom with autonomy also underscores the feeling that “Latin America” represents something different vis-à-vis the rest of the West, and that the peripheral status it has historically been assigned is in fact a reflection—albeit a “distorted” one—of a singularity that cannot easily be translated into the common language of the Western tradition. The seemingly ubiquitous repetition of the anthropological theme of a “return to the origin” in the Boom novel underscores both of the senses at work in this notion of symbolic autonomy. This theme tropologically asserts the power of Latin American literature itself to name and bestow meaning. At the same time, in repeating a view of Latin America that has always formed a central point in the European imaginary (Latin America as “Nature” vs. Europe as “culture”), it also points to the necessary failure of all naming, the void which haunts the advent of the signifier.

¿Pero la América Latina, qué es? ¿Acaso se trata de nada más que de una noción geográfica, buena para delimitar la masa de tierra que del Río Grande se extiende hasta el Cabo de Hornos? ¿O de una comunidad puramente lingüística, formada por las veintiuna naciones americanas que hablan lenguas derivadas del latín?

¿O si representa el término *algo más* y cosa distinta de esas dos definiciones un tanto elementales, como tácitamente se supone o expresamente se estatuye hoy día, dondequiera que de Latinoamérica se hable o se escriba en otras latitudes?

Compartimos esta última opinión, aunque no sabríamos decir a ciencia cierta en qué consiste ese “algo más,” esa “otra cosa” por la cual acaso se distingue la América del Sur fundamentalmente de la del Norte, o del Viejo Mundo, de Asia, de Oceanía, etc., y la incertidumbre se nos hace característica del fenómeno mismo que contemplamos.

[But Latin America, what is it? Is it nothing more than a geographical notion, useful for delimiting the land mass that begins at the Rio Grande and runs south to Cape Horn? Or is it simply a linguistic community formed by the twenty-one American nations which speak languages derived from Latin?

Or does it represent *something more* and other than these somewhat elementary definitions, as is tacitly assumed or expressly stated today whenever one speaks or writes of Latin America in other latitudes?

We are of the latter opinion, although we would not know how to say for certain what this “something more” or “otherness” is, which distinguishes South America from North America, and from the Old World, Asia, Oceania, etc. And this uncertainty, it seems to us, is characteristic of the very phenomenon we are contemplating.]

The journal’s turn to Latin America as a topos worthy of reflection underscores, as this excerpt from the “Adónde vamos” statement shows, the importance which the journal had always attributed to literature. As the editorial statement cited here emphasizes, the question of Latin America—“What is it?”—is taken up as something that cannot be answered by the sciences, and which likewise cannot be reduced to any of the specific empirical traits (geography, language, etc.) that distinguish this region from those in other latitudes. Indeed, Latin America would seem to stand for something in excess of any definition—or maybe it is the excess *of* definition itself, the fact that no definition quite fits when it comes to Latin America. If we read between the lines here, we can gather that it is the task of literature—and perhaps literature alone—to come to terms with this radical uncertainty at the heart of (Latin American) being.

ECO AND THE SPECTER OF NIHILISM: LANGUAGE, VALUES, AND DEATH

Let us return to the “Propósito” editorial statement cited above. The text begins with a translated excerpt from Ernst Jünger’s recently published *An der Zeitmauer* (1959): “The West has many sciences, and is capable of

turning even the most insignificant matter into scientific knowledge. For all this, however, it lacks a science of happiness.” This explicit differentiation of “happiness” or well-being from “knowledge” and “progress” follows the same path established in Jünger’s earlier diagnoses of Western modernity as suffering from the cancerous spread of nihilism (see Junger 1931, 1951). The editorial statement goes on to refer to a world crisis characterized by “a severe undermining of values, whose consequences include a lack of harmony within today’s culture and civilization.” For Jünger, nihilism is realized when all spheres of life are reduced to the logic of technicity, which he describes as “total work-character” (*totalen Arbeitscharakter*). In other words, the calculus of labor, which measures everything in terms of efficiency and exchange value, becomes the only conceivable—because entirely self-evident—measure for all of being. The crisis, as both Jünger and *Eco* understand it from their respective positions, entails a conflict between the humanist tradition and its highest values on the one hand, and an increasingly dominant array of techno-scientific and capitalist forces whose calculus is grounded exclusively in self-affirmation on the other hand.

The translated presence of Jünger in *Eco* raises interesting questions about the possibilities of “overcoming” nihilism, and moreover about what resources the humanist tradition—and especially art and literature—might still be able to contribute today in a confrontation with nihilism. Let me now propose that the exchange between Ernst Jünger and Martin Heidegger concerning the nature of nihilism, as well as the question of confronting it, can help to shed light on the cultural politics of *Eco*. More specifically, Heidegger’s reading of Jünger can be used to show that the recourse to culturalism is unable to distance itself sufficiently from what it seeks to resist, precisely because the metaphysical determination of culture—as a form of permanence or transcendence—is always already marked by the spectral essence of nihilism. The culturalist negation of nihilism is itself nihilistic. But in so doing, I do not wish to suggest that an unacknowledged “nihilism” defines the entirety of *Eco* and its possibilities.

Heidegger’s response to Jünger, originally written for a collection published in 1955 in honor of the latter, first bore a very similar title to Jünger’s

1951 essay: *Über "die Linie."*⁴ In that essay, Heidegger suggests that Jünger's diagnosis of nihilism, as well as the course of treatment he prescribes for moving into a new phase of cultural life, may in fact be too hastily conceived. The medical model of diagnosis and prognosis is a bit *too* eager to identify the disease in order to have done with it. By single-mindedly pursuing a "cure," we ignore an equally grave danger: that the very discourse we charge with leading us out of the abyss of nihilism is in fact part and parcel of what is going badly with the world today.

Jünger's analysis employs the spatial metaphor of a "zero line" (*Null-Linie*) to describe the culmination of nihilism, demarcating a time in which the essence of nihilism will have silently infiltrated all the "component realities" (*Bestand*) of our world (all social relations, practices, and rationalities) and established itself as the "normal state," as something that goes without saying. According to Jünger, we are today moving into this zone of fulfilled nihilism, which is embodied by the total subsumption of all humanity in the figure of the worker. The "worker," in Jünger's analysis, functions as a topos and organizes a kind of "optical system," allowing him to track the planetary spread of nihilism via the technological reduction of all reality to what he calls "total work-character." We will have entered into the zone of accomplished nihilism when the rationality specific to labor, always already calculated to generate more accumulation—its ways of organizing social relations, measuring time and value, valuing productivity over all other concerns—succeeds in establishing itself as the one and only true measure. Crossing the line would open up two very distinct possibilities: either we could end up in the timeless nothingness of full-blown nihilism, or we could find ourselves to have stepped out of nihilism and into something new. Jünger, needless to say, favors the second possibility, which he terms a "new turning-towards or granting on the part of being" (*Zuwendung des Seins*).

Heidegger, meanwhile, finds problematic the assumption that we have already foreseen the totality of what nihilism has to offer in all of its various manifestations, and thus find ourselves prepared to surpass this phenomenon essentially. Before we can begin to speak of crossing the line (if we can ever speak of crossing it), we must first know what we are speaking

of when we refer to the line itself. He thus frames his original title as a question of the line, or of a phenomenon whose essence, he insists, is not itself nihilistic. Until the essence of nihilism has itself been thought, any project claiming to lead the way to a final overcoming of nihilism will remain suspect, unable to ask whether or not it is in fact governed by the very same logic it seeks to surpass. Nihilism, Heidegger cautions, is the most unhomely of guests (*dieses unheimlichster aller Gäste*), an interloper who may be found to have been lurking in the house of ontological thinking for longer than anyone would have reason to suspect. "They seek salvation in flight, namely in flight form a glimpse of the worthiness of questioning the metaphysical position of man" (Heidegger 1958, 47).

To see why this is the case, let us look again at Jünger's attempt to diagnose the tendential fulfillment of nihilism through the figure of the worker. In his analysis of the worker, he is concerned not with the individual person and his or her alienation so much as with what lies behind these experiences: a Gestalt that imprints its mark on the fluid world of things and beings. The Gestalt, or the "being in repose" that is embodied by the worker, is distinct from that being which is subject to change. Unlike theology, Gestalt does not name a first cause that brings beings into the world, but is instead the "stamp" that imprints meaning on an otherwise meaningless world of beings. In this sense, it is far closer to the concept of "culture" we have been discussing than to "God." But as Heidegger points out, this ontological distinction is not found only in nihilism: the name for the difference between being understood as "stamp" and being understood as "impressions" is *transcendence*, and it belongs fundamentally to the metaphysical tradition. Beginning with Plato's world of Forms, transcendence construes meaning as something that is bestowed or transferred between a (transcendental) subject and a (finite) object, between an agent who stamps and a passive recipient that is marked.

Of course, Jünger's account of nihilism also differs from classical theories of transcendence in at least one important way. Unlike Plato, Jünger does not view the difference between the transcendent and the finite in terms of two worlds held apart in near-absolute separation. On the contrary,

the transcendental subject of Jünger's existential analysis is humanity itself—not this human or that group, but rather the species or type itself. Insofar as humanity understands itself essentially as subject or will, it automatically becomes the basis of all meaning and value. The subject is the will to will, and it would prefer to will nothing rather than not will at all. In light of this key distinction between classical transcendence and Jünger's use of the concept, Heidegger's response is equally valid for any other project that grounds itself in a concept of “humanity” or “tradition.”

According to its own terms, the success or failure of Heidegger's response to Jünger hinges on his ability to tease out a hidden link between the metaphysical tradition and its grounding in transcendence on the one hand, and nihilism understood as the absolute sovereignty of the will on the other. The starting point for this endeavor is the status of “the nothing” and its relation to “being,” a problem which haunts metaphysics from its inception (“Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?”). But here Heidegger encounters a problem: the only vocabulary available to us for this task has already been co-opted by the metaphysical tradition and its particular determination of being as transcendence. For metaphysics, the question of “the nothing” cannot be posed in any seriousness, since this system is premised on the determination of “being” as subject, as wholeness or presence to self. On such a ground, “the nothing” can only be heard in a vocabulary that is foreign to it: as a “lack” or “deficiency” of being. Indeed, there can be no information or definition of the terms “being,” “nothingness,” or “nihilism” that is not already determined by the metaphysical determination of being as presence, or presence to itself.

In order to free ourselves from this constraint, Heidegger suggests, a different way of speaking (*ein anderes Sagen*) is needed. He illustrates the radical nature of what he has in mind when he proceeds to substitute for the word “being” (bracketed in scare quotes: *des “Seins”*) a symbol comprised of the word “being” struck through with a diagonal cross (*des ~~Seins~~*). The crossing-out of being indicates the suspension of the transcendental relation between “being in repose” and the world of impressions. Being, as such, is not always already there such that it could turn toward the

world and impress it in this or that way. On the contrary, there is no being except in and as the turning or the crossing that constitutes history. Being itself is therefore both called forth *and* dissolved in the turning.

Nothingness would have to be written, and that means thought of, just like ~~being~~. Inherent in this is that the essence of man which remembers belongs to nothingness and not only as something added. If, therefore, in nihilism nothingness attains dominance in a special manner, then man is not only affected by nihilism but has an essential share in it. But then the entire human “component realities” also do not stand somewhere on this side of the line in order to cross over it and to settle down on the other side next to being. The essence of man itself belongs to the essence of nihilism and thereby to the phase of its completion. Man, as the essence put into use [*gebrauchte*] in ~~being~~ helps to constitute the zone of ~~being~~ and that means at the same time of nothingness. Man does not only stand *in* the critical zone of the line. He himself, but not he for himself and particularly not through himself alone, *is* this zone and thus the line. (83)

In asserting an “essential” connection between the human and nihilism, this passage relies on the notion of the reciprocal “usage” (*Brauch*) of the human and being, a thought which Heidegger develops at greater length in the essays on language. While one often says that one uses language, and one can also state that one puts beings to use, according to Heidegger being itself (or rather, ~~being~~) similarly “uses” the human—in and through language—in order to take place. The crossing-out of the signifier “~~being~~,” which denotes the suspension of any permanent, essential link to a signified, initiates an attempt to think being as “finite transcendence,” or as being that “is” only in the open trajectory of a historical project.

By way of closing, let us consider Heidegger’s passage in the context of what *Eco* refers to as “Western culture.” On one hand, “~~being~~” is a name for finitude, for a mark or scar that, at the moment of speaking, reveals this common tradition as not-all. For as soon as one says “we” (and Latin American cultural production’s myriad attempts to situate itself within the Western tradition are all functions of a desire for communion), one is

always already different from oneself. At the same time, ~~being~~ also names the opening to an outside (a different kind of cut) that is the condition of possibility for saying or hearing anything new at all. The projected overcoming of nihilism, whether it understands itself as a recuperation or a renewal of the highest values, is always a refusal of this finitude/opening.

The Boom novel could be situated on either side of this line. That is, it can be seen either as an imagined crossing of the line, or as an approach toward its “essence.” Depending on how one understands it, literature is either an attempt to evade an encounter with the nothing (for instance, insofar as we understand literature to be the memory of the Western tradition, or to embody “the best that has been thought and said”), or it is precisely a staging of this missed encounter (insofar as literature calls attention to the fundamental instability of language itself). Better put, literary language is paradoxically both of these at the same time. Likewise, the phenomenon of *Eco: Revista de la cultura de occidente*, which is in large part a project of translating and publishing literature, would seem to embody both of these tendencies to a certain degree. What, after all, are we speaking of when we say “echo”? What “is” an echo? Can we even pose this question? Does it have a being? To say “echo” is no doubt to presuppose the existence of an “original,” and therefore, perhaps, to align oneself with transcendence. But what remains to be decided is whether this origin is “being,” or in fact the traversal of a void.



NOTES

1. The first Colombian writer to appear in the journal is Alvaro Mutis, whose short story “Sharaya” was published in volume 5 (September 1960). It would be another eight volumes (May 1961) before Fernando Charry Lara’s poem “El desterrado” and José Pubén’s short story “La merecedora” marked the reappearance of Latin American writers in *Eco*.
2. The only published discussion of *Eco* I have been able to identify is Eduardo Jaramillo’s fine essay “*Eco: Revista de la cultura de occidente, 1960–1984*” (1989).
3. Of course, it should also be noted that the very concept of “culture,” at least in the specific modern sense of mimesis, of the formation of the intellectual faculties according

to an *eidos*, has always acted as a symptom of crisis. That is, what was so apparent to nineteenth-century intellectuals—the need for “culture” as a forum in which to represent human “wholeness”—arose, in Europe at least, in direct proportion to the perceived ill effects of industrial modernization (i.e., the fragmentation of social relations and the distorted development of the organic person due to modern demands for specialization), while in Latin America the desire for “culture” and “civilization” was in large part a function of Latin American intellectuals having equated the signifiers “modernity” and “Europe.”

4. The essay was later republished under a different title, *Zur Seinsfrage*. English translations are available in *The Question of Being* (Heidegger 1958) and *Pathmarks* (Heidegger 1998). In the foreword to the slightly revised *Zur Seinsfrage* essay, Heidegger attributes the change in title to his concern for underscoring the connection between an interrogation of nihilism and what he describes as “a discussion of being as ~~being~~” (*einer Erörterung des Seins als ~~Sein~~ herkommt*). (1958, 33). The change of title thus points out what is for Heidegger the telling difference between his attempt to think nihilism, and Jünger’s attempt to think his way out of nihilism.

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